Notes from the Curriculum Writer:

Dear Educators,

Thank you for engaging your students in Milwaukee Film’s Education Screening of Wrestle. This is an exciting opportunity for students and educators to engage with a film that digs deep into the lives of four student-athletes in Huntsville, Alabama. While these young men grow up in the South, 650 miles away from Milwaukee, their adolescent challenges are a shared experience for youth everywhere. Connections can be made particularly for young people of color, living in financially challenging circumstances, facing not only the typical growth spurts of becoming a person in the world but who are also navigating the systems and structures that continually oppress, marginalize, and stunt their growth.

In this documentary, we are invited into these student-athletes’ lives in both big and small moments. We are there for the victories on the mat and the losses in their lives, and vice versa. We see the emotions and dynamics of a group of young people who are trying to figure out their place in the world; a world that frequently doesn’t allow young men the space and grace to grow into their authentic selves.

As a former coach, this documentary touched my heart and reminded me of all the good that high school athletics and activities can bring to our students and our communities. It also conjured up conflicting feelings about the harm we can do even when we believe we are guiding and helping our student-athletes, revealed how toxic masculinity can be an artery in the heart of many sports programs, and prompted questions about the cost of competition on a young person’s heart and mind. I know that you and your students will have meaningful dialogues around these same issues and the unique questions and perspectives that they will inevitably share.

In wrestling, a bridge is a move where you turn your body and arch your back to avoid getting pinned. My hope is for students to build a bridge with these activities, to make connections with Jailen, Jaquan, Teague, and Jamario, learn more about themselves and the systems and structures they are living in, and to avoid the stereotypical outcomes that society wants to pin on so many teenagers today.

Heather Hanson
Social Studies and Film Studies Teacher, South Milwaukee High School
Milwaukee Film Curriculum Writer
Notes from Milwaukee Film:

For educators to note prior to the screening: there are a few scenes in the documentary that warrant a content warning. Addiction, abandonment, and death of a loved one are all mentioned. However, it is the extremely tense scenes between Jailen and law enforcement as well as Jaquan's arrest that may be especially disturbing to viewers. They are appropriate for high school aged viewers, but educators should be aware.

The activities in this packet are designed with an entry-level approach in mind – regardless of grade level, you can tailor these activities to best suit the needs of your students who you know best. You can choose to engage in one, some, or all of the activities provided depending on your time constraints. You can build off of them and create your own connections for the students as well, diving deeply into the subject matter that best correlates to your lesson planning.

You can send evidence of the work you did to integrate the film into your classroom electronically or by mail. This could include: links to online content, Google Drive folders, scanned material, photocopied or original student work concerning the film/film-going experience or even your own anecdotal, narrative accounts. **We should receive this evidence of your integration of the film into your classroom by June 20, 2023.** All of what you send us will help us write and fulfill the grants that allow us to bring these films to you and your students at such a low cost. We may also post some of the best work on our website (with students’ first names and school only) later in the year (if you would prefer we not share your students’ work publicly, please let us know).

There is an Essay Contest in this packet! Submit writing from your students in response to the standard prompt we offer here by December 31, 2023, for consideration. A panel of judges will select the best essay and a runner-up in each grade range to receive a bookstore gift certificate as a prize. See the Essay Contest handout in this packet for more details.

Send student work or evidence via email to marielle@mkefilm.org or by mail to:

Milwaukee Film
Attn: Marielle Allschwang, Education Manager
1037 W. McKinley Ave, Suite 200
Milwaukee, WI 53205

Our screening of *Wrestle* with post-screening discussion additionally fulfill the following Common Core ELA Literacy Standards for Speaking and Listening: SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.2, SL.9-10.3, SL.9-10.6, SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.2, SL.11-12.3, SL.11-12.6. We’ve also included the following National Core Standards for Media Arts: Re7.1.I, Re7.1.II, Re8.1.I, Re8.1.II, Cn10.1.I, Cn10.1.II, Cn11.1.I.
Wrestle Activities and Standards At-A-Glance

The order provided here is the recommended order for the activities provided in this packet. Activities were designed for a 45-50 minute class period.

What Is a Documentary? (3 parts: Before, During, and After Screening)


National Core Media Arts Standards: MA:Cn.11.1.I, MA: Re.7.1.I, MA:Re.8.1.I, MA:Re.9.1.1.HS.III

The 4 Ps: Pre-Reading Strategies for Film (2 Parts: Before AND After Screening)


National Core Media Arts Standards: MA:Cn.11.1.I, MA:Re.7.1.I, MA:Re.8.1.I, MA:Re.9.1.1.HS.III

Interview with a Filmmaker (2 parts: Before Screening, but After Screening recommended)


National Core Media Arts Standards: MA:Cn.11.1.I, MA:Re.7.1.I, MA:Re.8.1.I, MA:Re.9.1.1.HS.III

Capturing the Competitive Spirit (3 Parts: Before or After Screening)


When the Mat Isn't Level: Wrestling with Trauma (4 Parts: After Screening)


Teacher Background for *What Is a Documentary?*

Students will learn about the genre of documentary film by sharing their experiences with non-fiction media, attending the screening of *Wrestle*, and analyzing what categorizes it as a documentary film. Students are asked to respond to questions about the content and purpose of the documentary. The goal of this work is for students gain more familiarity with how documentary films are built so they can have a more structured and meaningful viewing experience.

These activities are designed to be completed before, during (if possible), and after the screening, and first in the sequence of curriculum activities, to expose students to conventions in documentary film.

The goal of *What is a Documentary?* is to create a working definition of what a documentary is through exploring the students’ own experiences with media, and their subsequent experience viewing and analyzing *Wrestle*. The basic progression of conversation topics is: 1) Based on your experience thus far, what makes a documentary film? 2) After viewing the documentary at the Oriental Theatre, how has the film met, challenged, or changed your preconceptions of documentary films? What surprised you? What inspired you?

**Duration:** two class periods

**Teacher Resources:**

- Worksheets (provided on next several pages)
What is a Documentary?  

NAME: ____________________________

This activity is broken into multiple sections. You will be watching a documentary, Wrestle, at the Oriental Theatre. Be sure to complete the appropriate task before, during, and after the viewings as indicated. Be prepared to discuss your analysis with your classmates.

**Part One - Before Viewing:**

1. What do you already know about documentary films?

2. What documentary films have you seen?

3. What made the film(s) documentaries (how did you know, what elements did it have)?
Part Two – During or After viewing:

Documentaries often aim to engage viewers through emotional and/or persuasive means. A filmmaker makes a series of choices to tell a story, i.e. who they interview, what events and information to include and to omit, what footage they will show, cinematography, music choices, etc.

1. What story are Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer (co-directors) telling viewers? What choices did they make that help inform your ideas?

2. Does this documentary seem more informational rather than persuasive? In what ways?

3. How do you feel as you watch the film?
4. The film introduces us to multiple student-athletes who wrestle for J.O. Johnson High School in Huntsville, Alabama. The four teenagers the documentary focuses on are: Teague Berres, Jaquan Rhodes, Jamario Rowe, and Jailen Young.

   a) Which student-athlete do you connect with most? Why?

   b) Which student-athlete do you struggle with connecting? Why?

   c) Does the film portray each of the student-athletes fairly?

5. The film threads together multiple stories of the student-athletes and the progression of their season as well as key aspects of their personal lives. How do the filmmakers weave these threads together into a cohesive narrative? Are they successful?
**Part Three - After Viewing:**

1. What is/are the central message(s) of this documentary? Be specific. Use examples from the documentary (text) to support your choice.

2. Consider the goals of the filmmaker and discuss whether or not they achieved them.
   - Was the film successful in authentically telling the story of each of these young men?
   - Was the film successful in addressing the larger social issues that touched each of the subject's lives as well as the story of their wrestling season?

3. With the various narratives woven together throughout the documentary, writing a succinct and clear synopsis can be challenging. Take on that challenge by writing your own brief (2-3 sentence) synopsis of the film.
4. If you could ask the filmmakers, Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer, a question(s), what would it be and why would you ask it?

5. What is a story you believe needs to be told through a documentary film? How would you tell it?
Teacher Background for *The 4 Ps: Pre-Reading Strategies for Film*

When watching a film or other media for academic purposes, it can be helpful for students to engage in pre-reading strategies. The very same skills that students use before digging into a short story, novel, article, etc. can be applied to complex audio-visual text as well. Gaining confidence in using these skills with a visual text can increase confidence and improve literacy skills with written text as well.

In this two-part activity, students will first view the trailer for the documentary *Wrestle* and engage in the 4 Ps activity provided. A discussion of their findings should follow and can be done in small groups or as a whole class. After students have attended the screening of the documentary, they will come back to their pre-reading activity and analyze their responses. Again, a discussion should follow and can be small group or whole class.

This activity is designed to be completed both before and after viewing the documentary and is broken into two parts. In the part one, students will view the trailer and complete a chart with pre-reading strategies. In part two, they will return to their chart, analyze their responses with the new information they have gained from seeing the entire documentary, and summarize what they predicted vs. what the film was about.

**Teacher Resources:**

- Computer, internet, projector/screen, or Smartboard
- [Link to the trailer for Wrestle](https://www.wrestlefilm.com) or go to [www.wrestlefilm.com](http://www.wrestlefilm.com) and click on ‘trailer’ heading

**Duration:** one to two class periods (depending upon depth of discussion)
**The 4 Ps: Pre-Reading Strategies for Film**

Just as we often read a synopsis of a book prior to reading it in order to make a decision on whether or not we’d like to read it, movie trailers allow us to get a glimpse into a full-length film and determine whether we’d like to watch the entire film. Academically, reading a synopsis or watching a trailer can help us determine themes, conflicts, and other important key elements of a piece of text.

In this activity, you will view the trailer for the film, Wrestle. After viewing the trailer, you will complete a chart that will take you through four pre-reading strategies. Please be as detailed as you can as you fill out each of the 4Ps: preview, predict, purpose, and prior knowledge.

**Part One:** After viewing the trailer for the documentary *Wrestle*, please complete the following chart on these four pre-reading strategies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREVIEW</th>
<th>PREDICT</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>PRIOR KNOWLEDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cite the type of text and its genre and provide details from trailer that led you to your response</td>
<td>Predict what you think the film is about and what will happen</td>
<td>Identify what the purpose of the film is: to entertain, inform, persuade, or a combination.</td>
<td>List any prior knowledge you have about this type of film, the topic(s) it addresses, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part Two: Now that you have seen the documentary, take a look at your responses from the trailer activity and respond to the following questions:

- Were any of your predictions accurate?
- Was the purpose of the film what you identified or did your opinion change after seeing the film?
- How did your prior knowledge, or lack of prior knowledge, impact the way you viewed the film?
- How can trailers (of any movie) help potential viewers make connections to themes and messages that the filmmakers feel are important? Can trailers also mislead potential viewers into believing a film is about something it is not?
Teacher Background for *Interview with a Filmmaker*

In order for students to gain a deeper understanding of the time and effort that went into making *Wrestle*, they will actively read an interview with the filmmakers, Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer, and respond to questions. This activity is designed to be done after viewing the documentary but could also be done beforehand but knowing there will be some spoilers for students. The activity is broken into two parts.

**Duration:** one class period

**Teacher Resources:**

- Computer, internet, projector/screen or smartboard if you intend to read together as a class
- Chromebooks, iPads, or laptops that can enable the links to the interview or hard copies that are printed out for student use
- Link to interview (provided)

**Instructions:**

- Have students actively read the interview and then answer the provided questions. You may choose to have students write formally or informally.
- Have students discuss their answers in small groups or together as a whole class.
You will be reading an interview with the filmmakers of *Wrestle*, Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer. After you read the interview, jot down notes and answers to the below questions on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to discuss your analysis with your classmates.

ESPNW Interview with Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer

‘Not Everyone’s Mat is Level’ — *Wrestle* Doc Examines Race and Privilege in High School Sports
By Ericka N. Goodman-Hughey of ESPNW, April 9th, 2019

- Who are the co-directors of the documentary? How does their identity differ from the student-athletes featured in the film? Why is that important or not important?

- How many hours of footage did Suzannah Herbert and Lauren Belfer record?

- How and why did the filmmakers decide to follow these four particular student-athletes?

- When asked how they gained the trust of the student-athletes, what did the filmmakers cite as key points to establishing trust and building a relationship?

- There are challenging scenes in the documentary. Why did the filmmakers decide to continue filming even through those difficult moments?

- The filmmakers stated that they tried to avoid the common “sports as savior” trope. How did they accomplish that?

- The filmmakers note that they did not intend for Coach Scribner to be the focus of the film as so many other “white savior” narratives are centered in movies. How did they avoid that?

- What does filmmaker Lauren Belfer cite as her hope for audiences after seeing the documentary?
Teacher Background for Capturing the Competitive Spirit

The documentary focuses its lens on our four student-athletes in various aspects of their lives, including on the mat, in the classroom, and in their personal lives. Many of the most exciting scenes are those of our student-athletes when they are competing, but there are also compelling moments when the student-athletes are practicing/training as well.

This activity will allow students to make connections between sports and community, individuals and competition, among other themes that they may recognize. It will also allow students to explore sports photography and engage in visual thinking strategies that will strengthen their media literacy skills and analytical thinking skills.

This is a three-part activity where students will brainstorm about sports photography in general, then examine collections of sports photography, and then engage in a creation portion. In part two, you will engage in a VTS (Visual Thinking Strategy) activity by displaying sports photos that the students select and asking the three key VTS questions:

- What’s going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Here are a few techniques to enable the best outcome for students: when using the three basic questions listed above, teachers should allow students to answer freely, without saying “you’re right” or “that’s it”. After asking “what do you see that makes you say that”, paraphrase what students have observed and use phrases like “it looks like” and “it could be” to encourage more than one idea.

Teacher Resources:

- Computer, internet, projector/screen, or Smartboard
- Chromebooks/laptops
- Create a virtual space (Google Classroom, Jamboard, Slides) to be shared with students
- Students will need access to camera or a device with a camera (cell phones work great!)

Duration: three class periods
Capturing the Competitive Spirit

The documentary Wrestle focuses its lens on four student-athletes in various aspects of their lives, including on the mat, in the classroom, and in their personal lives. Many of the most exciting scenes are those of the featured student-athletes when they are competing. However, there are also compelling moments when the student-athletes are practicing/training as well. The filmmakers captured these moments in moving images (film), but athletes are captured on film, both still and moving, all the time. For this activity, you will focus on sports photography, the principles of it, and how sports photojournalism can uplift and educate audiences.

Part One: Before looking at specific sports photojournalism examples, please answer the following questions:

• When you think about sports photography, what are some images/examples that come to mind?
• What makes a sports photograph unique and compelling? What qualities does a good sports photograph possess? How does good sports photography make us feel?
• Do you follow any athletes, sports organizations, or sports media sites? What kinds of images do they use for their social media outlets?

Part Two: Now that you have had a conversation about sports photography and what makes a good sports photograph, let’s take a look at some iconic sports photography throughout history. Utilize these three collections of important sports photographs and be prepared to engage in a VTS (Visual Thinking Strategy) activity with your teacher and classmates:

• ESPN’s Iconic Sports Images of the Decade (2010s)
• Sports Illustrated’s 100 Greatest Sports Photos of All Time
• The Score’s 22 of the Best Sports Snapshots of 2022

After taking some time to explore and examine these collections, select your favorite photograph, copy/paste into a Google Slide that you share with your teacher, and be prepared to engage in a VTS activity with the class.

VTS Questions:

• What’s going on in this picture?
• What do you see that makes you say that?
• What more can you find?
Part Three: After discussing what makes a good sports photograph, thinking about the sports photography you encounter on social media, and closely examining examples of sports photographs, it is time for you to engage in some sports photography. To complete this portion of the lesson, you will need a working camera – that can be the camera on your phone or an actual camera.

- Go out into your community and photograph sports activities. This can include your school’s athletic programs, people playing sports in public parks/courts/fields, college and professional sports, etc.
- You can take a variety of photographs of multiple sports or focus on one.
- Take the three best photographs you took and put them into a Google slide show, Canva presentation, etc. and share out with the class.
- Along with the photos, be ready to explain a brief explanation of what you were able to capture in each of your shots and why it spoke to you.
Teacher Background for When the Mat Isn’t Level: Wrestling with Mental Health

Throughout the documentary, the student-athletes face challenges both on and off the mat including poverty, addiction, death of a loved one, unplanned pregnancy, and a tense encounter with law enforcement. These traumas impact and shape the young men in ways that they are both aware of and unaware of which leads to different outcomes for each of them. Not only do these young men experience these traumas, but that trauma is compounded by the institutional racism and unconscious bias of the coaches, educators, school, and legal systems in their lives. Frequently, students of color who struggle with mental health issues are identified not for support, but as “behavior” problems, which leads to punishments and restrictions vs. help and growth.

This activity is intended to allow students to openly discuss mental health issues, read about a teenager who is actively advocating for mental health support for students and athletes who are attempting to destigmatize mental health issues in our communities, and to identify what they believe their own schools and communities need and can do to support teen mental health.

The activity is broken into four parts and is intended to be completed after viewing the documentary. Parts three and four can be optional and you can alter/edit as appropriate for your students. In the first activity, students will reflect on the four young men in the film. In part two, they will engage in some reading and discussion. In part three, they have the option to write a letter to their future selves (which you can keep and give back to them at a later date). Finally, in part four you can choose to have students write responses formally or discuss informally.

Classroom teachers know their students best and you are encouraged to use these activities and edit them in whatever way that makes the most sense for your students. Providing a safe space for students to discuss their own experiences is a vital part of this activity and you will know best how to navigate that for your students. In some cases, this may mean editing or omitting certain components of the activities. At a minimum, educators should provide content warnings and mindful introductions of issues that students will be encountering in these pieces.

NOTE: Some of the language in the selected pieces from professional athletes contain some language, references to drug and alcohol addiction/abuse, depression, and suicide.

Teacher Resources:

- Projector/Screen or Smartboard
- Chromebooks/Laptops
- Links to articles/interview or PDF copies

Duration: two to three class periods
When the Mat Isn't Level: Wrestling with Mental Health    NAME: ______________________

Throughout the documentary, the student-athletes face challenges both on and off the mat including poverty, addiction, death of a loved one, unplanned pregnancy, and a tense encounter with law enforcement. These activities are designed to allow you as a student to both internally explore how trauma impacts people in different ways, learn about activists and athletes who are working to end the stigma that surrounds mental health, and identify ways in which your school and community can be more responsive to students’ mental health needs.

**Part One:** After viewing the documentary, identify what issues each of the student-athletes grappled with over the course of the film, and reflect on your own connections to those issues, i.e. addiction in your family or your own life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-Athlete</th>
<th>Issues/Trauma</th>
<th>Your Connection/Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jailen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaquan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teague</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamario</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part Two: All students should read the following interview [A Young Detroit Activist Carries the Torch for Better Student Mental Health Services](#). Students should then select two pieces by professional athletes to read:

- **A Letter to Young Black Men by Steve Francis (NBA)**
- **Dear Black Women by A'ja Wilson (WNBA)**
- **The Things You Can’t See by Colin Wilson (NHL)**
- **To Anybody Going Through It by Kevin Love (NBA)**

Part Three: After completing parts one and two of this activity, write a letter to your future self. Use a letter format (through Word or Google Docs), complete sentences, and proper grammar/spelling. Use these prompts to guide you:

- **Who I Am Now:** write about who are you in this moment – your hopes, fears, goals, challenges, etc. You are writing to your future, older self who may not remember what it was like at this time in your life right now.

- **What My Life Is About:** write about the people who are important to you, the activities/hobbies/interests that are of interest to you, where you feel most authentically yourself, etc. Get specific here – if listening to music brings you joy, get specific about the artists you love most, the sound that hits you in the feels, etc.

- **What I Want:** What do you want for your future self? Think less about a specific job or career (although you can include that) and more about yourself as a whole person – what does a happy, stable, successful life look for you in 5 years? 10 Years? 20 years?
Part Four: After completing parts one and two of this activity, write an authentic response to the following questions.

1. Why is there a negative stigma around mental health issues in our culture? Do you feel that is changing?

2. In the film, Jamario experiences many highs and lows and it seems that he is struggling with his mental health. Frequently, students of color are tagged as having “behavior problems” when in actuality they are experiencing a mental health crisis.

3. In the film, J.O. Johnson High School was underfunded and set to be shut down. Public schools across the country are facing budget crises and often times the first items to be cut are counselors, teachers, and other frontline staff who directly respond to the needs of students. Does your school and community have structures and systems that support young people’s mental health? What are they? Are students and families aware of them?

4. What could schools and communities do differently to support young people’s mental health? You can think small scale and big scale changes here – think of the possibilities, not the obstacles.
**2023 ESSAY CONTEST**

For a fifth year, Milwaukee Film is hosting an Essay Contest in conjunction with our Education Screenings. A judging panel will select the best essay and a runner-up from essays submitted in response to each screening’s standard, provided essay prompt. Winners and runners-up will receive an award in the form of a certificate and a gift card to a local bookstore. Submissions will be read anonymously, with name and school information removed from each essay prior to distribution to judges. Judges will assess each essay using a rubric informed by the Common Core State Standards for writing appropriate to the grade band into which the writing falls.

**Submission Details:**

- You may elect to send all of your students' work or just a selection.
- For each submission, attach a completed and signed release slip (a set of these forms is attached).
- Mail all submissions to:
  
  Milwaukee Film attn: Essay Contest  
  1037 W. McKinley Ave #200  
  Milwaukee, WI 53205

- **Submissions must be postmarked by {date needed}**
- Teachers of winning entries will be notified by {date needed}, 2023 and we will coordinate a date/time to present the award to the student. Due to anticipated volume, we unfortunately cannot inform all submissions’ teachers.

**Essay Prompt—Grades 9-12:**

In the opening scene of the film, *Wrestle*, we witness a night practice with athletes running hills with a teammate on their back. The choice to open the documentary with this scene sets the stage for larger metaphors explored throughout the film. Write an essay that analyzes how the four student-athletes carry symbolic weight upon their shoulders, but also how they lift each other up throughout the film. In your response, address the symbolism in the filmmakers’ choice to introduce the audience to the team in this fashion and how they weave that narrative of being weighed down and then uplifted throughout the film. Your essay should be a minimum of five paragraphs and include specific examples from the film.

» **TEACHERS!** Feel free to do preparatory work in your classroom to help students do their best writing on this topic. For example, you might use the film guide at the front of this packet to jog students’ memories of the films they saw. After students have completed a first draft, feel free to have them workshop their writing and revise/edit their work accordingly. Submissions may be handwritten or typed, depending on your resource.
MILWAUKEE FILM ESSAY CONTEST RELEASE FORM

Include a completed copy of this slip with each submission for the 2023 Essay Contest. Please type or print legibly.

Student Full Name ________________________________________________________________

Teacher Full Name ________________________________________________________________

Teacher Email ________________________________________________________________

Teacher Phone Number ____________________________________________________________

School Name ________________________________________________________________

I hereby authorize the above named child’s writing to be submitted for consideration in the Milwaukee Film 2023 Essay Contest:

Parent/Guardian Signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Parent/Guardian Full Name (printed) ___________________________

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School Name ________________________________________________________________

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